



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

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Clandestine Laboratories Removals Top 1,600 Projected Cost to Exceed \$10 Million in 1998-99

SACRAMENTO -- California Environmental Protection Agency's Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) Director Jesse R. Huff today announced that DTSC removed hazardous materials from nearly 1,600 clandestine drug labs in the 1997-98 fiscal year through a program authorized by the State's Superfund law. "Currently one of California's greatest environmental crises is potential exposure to chemicals from clandestine drug labs," said Peter M. Rooney, Secretary for Environmental Protection.

"Clearly, the chemicals used in these illegal methamphetamine labs pose a devastating threat to the environment and public health," said DTSC Director Jesse R. Huff. "In providing local and statewide law enforcement officials with technical expertise and assistance in removing hazardous chemicals from these labs we are serving an important role in responding to this serious problem."

Over the last three years, DTSC's budget for clandestine lab cleanup has grown from \$3 million in fiscal year 1995-96 to \$8 million in fiscal year 1997-98. DTSC officials estimate that the budget will increase to \$10.4 million in 1998-99.

DTSC responses to law enforcement calls for assistance at drug labs have grown from 965 in 1995-96 to 1,599 in 1997-98. DTSC responds to an average of four requests for assistance with clandestine lab removals per day statewide at an average cost of \$3,700 per lab.

"Most think clandestine labs are found only in rural areas . . . that is simply not true," said Huff. The labs are located in urban settings, rural settings and even motel rooms, posing health threats to neighbors and poisoning precious natural resources," Huff added.

Major clandestine drug lab hazardous waste removals, which are estimated to cost more than \$20,000, are coordinated with the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Some of the chemicals and the dangers associated with clandestine drug labs include:

- hydriodic acid - toxic, strong irritant to eyes and skin
- hydrogen chloride gas - toxic by inhalation, strong irritant to eyes, skin and respiratory system
- red phosphorus- flammable and unstable
- organic solvents like benzene - carcinogens, many flammable
- phosphine gas - toxic by inhalation
- sodium hydroxide - toxic or "caustic" may cause severe injury or death.

"Most are familiar with the destruction methamphetamine can cause in the lives of users, but few think of the environmental consequences associated with cleaning up after meth lab operators," Huff added.

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